



Testimony of
Roger Senserrich, Communications Director
Connecticut Working Families Organization
Housing Committee, March 10, 2022

Re: Testimony in Support of H.B. 5204, An Act Concerning a Needs Assessment and Fair Share Plans for Municipalities to Increase Affordable Housing

Good Morning Senator Williams, Representative Lopes, Vice-Chairs and Members of the Housing Committee. My name is Roger Senserrich, and I'm the Communications Director at the Connecticut Working Families Organization. We strive to be the political home of the multi-racial working class and run strategic legislative and electoral campaigns to advance social justice and create an economy that works for everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of H.B. 5204, An Act Concerning a Needs Assessment and Fair Share Plans for Municipalities to Increase Affordable Housing.

The need for Affordable Housing

Connecticut faces a housing crisis. [Close to half](#) of Connecticut households are considered as cost-burdened, spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs. [One in four residents in the state are severely cost burdened](#)¹, paying more than half of their income for housing.

Hispanic and Black households are much more likely to face these steep housing costs. Close to 60 percent of African-American households are cost burdened, compared to 55 percent for Latino and 43 for non-Hispanic White households.

The impact of unaffordable housing

The supply of affordable housing in our state is not only severely limited, but also heavily concentrated geographically.

¹ https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/ARH_2017_cost_burdens_by_race

Connecticut towns have long made use of aggressive exclusionary zoning practices to restrict new housing construction within their municipal limits. Be it through two-acre zoning, minimum parking requirements, burdensome approval procedures, claims of historical preservation, underbuilding infrastructure, or red tape, many wealthy suburban towns have all but blocked multi-family housing construction, effectively banning affordable housing construction - and excluding low-income families of color from their towns.

As a result, housing segregation, paired with a regressive property tax system, has become one of the main drivers of educational disparities in our state. Connecticut's opportunity gap is enforced using the zoning code by blocking affordable housing construction.

Economic impacts

Unaffordable housing has severe consequences not just regarding access to opportunity or leaving many working families struggling to pay rent, but also for the economic wellbeing of the state. When a business considers relocating to Connecticut, they see a state that is not just unaffordable, but that actually tries to dissuade workers to move here. Our [state ranked second to last](#)², only ahead of Rhode Island, on new building permits, between 2015 and 2020.

Much has been said, in recent years, about Connecticut's stagnation, on how our population is growing slowly and people are moving elsewhere. Our system of exclusionary zoning and aggressive NIMBYism might benefit some wealthy towns, but has a dire impact on the state as a whole.

We live in a wonderful state. People want to live here; that is the reason why housing is so expensive. By making the state unaffordable, we are chasing away economic investment. If we want to reverse these trends, we need to build actual housing, and do it in a way that is equitable and fair for everyone in the state.

Towards a solution

Connecticut Working Families supports H.B. 5204 because Connecticut needs both to build more housing and integrate our communities. This legislation establishes clear rules and regulations to promote new housing construction across the state. It is based on a detailed needs assessment using a fair, data driven approach, and trusts municipalities with the responsibility on how to achieve these goals. For those that shirk their responsibility, the bill includes meaningful enforcement provisions so towns cannot simply refuse affordable housing.

For decades, Connecticut has allowed segregationist, racist zoning and housing policies that have led us to become one of the most unequal states in the nation. We have built walls, using the zoning code and expensive housing, to exclude whole communities from economic

² <https://www.bigrentz.com/blog/states-with-most-home-development>

opportunity. In the process, we have made our state entirely unaffordable not just for workers, but for businesses as well.

It is time that we stop putting roadblocks and restrictions on housing - and get Connecticut moving forward again.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

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